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SUBJECT: GOS SQUEEZE ON NON-SIGNATORIES IN DARFUR

**¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY:** Following the December 30 arrest of Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) representative GEN Mohamed Bashir in El Fasher, the Government of Sudan (GoS) finally released Bashir but has ordered all non-signatory representatives to the ceasefire commission to leave El Fasher. As the last of the non-signatories prepare to depart El Fasher, there may be an increase in fighting among rebel groups and government forces (already happening in West Darfur). This situation will present a formidable challenge to UNAMID as it tries to keep some semblance of peace between the GoS and the exiled rebel movements. END SUMMARY.

JEM CFC REPS FORCED BACK TO THE FIELD

**¶12. (SBU)** After a two-week detention, JEM representative to the Ceasefire Commission (CFC) was finally released from military intelligence custody in El Fasher on January 17, along with six other JEM reps who had been taken along with him from his home on December 30. Military intelligence also released a recently detained JEM/Collective Leadership rep and a JEM/Khalil Ibrahim rep who had been arrested in Kulbus on December 14. The stipulation of the release, which was brokered by United Nations-African Union Mission in the Sudan (UNAMID) Joint Special Representative Adada and UNAMID Force Commander (FC) Agwai, was that all JEM/Khalil Ibrahim reps were to depart El Fasher for their areas of control within 24 hours.

**¶13. (SBU)** JEM reps flew out of El Fasher on January 18 via UNAMID aircraft to El Geneina, accompanied by UNAMID Chief of Staff (CoS) to ensure their safe arrival before they were to be lifted to the field. However, FieldOff received a call from a JEM rep aboard the plane then on the El Geneina runway; he reported that after surrounding the aircraft with ten vehicles, the GoS declared it had arrived unannounced and threatened to board it and arrest its passengers. The JEM rep was also trying to get in touch with the UNAMID FC, since the CoS had already left to return to El Fasher. FieldOff contacted the CoS, who immediately alerted the FC to follow up with the UNAMID Sector Commander in West Darfur. About 45 minutes later, FieldOff received a call from GEN Bashir, who called from a car en route to El Geneina military intelligence headquarters after the GoS had boarded the plane. Bashir reported that the Sector Commander was with them. At 2100h local time Bashir called to say that he and the other JEM members had been released to UNAMID custody and were awaiting a morning flight back to their area, since it was too late to transport them that night. The reps were flown via UNAMID helicopter to the Jebel Mun area on January 19.

JEM POSITION HARDENING

**¶14. (SBU)** GEN Bashir told FieldOff on January 20 that despite the satisfaction of being back in the field with fellow JEM members, the absence of a JEM presence in El Fasher would not bode well for the Darfur peace process or for the success of any peace or ceasefire agreements. He said the lack of security for non-signatory movements in El Fasher precluded the possibility of their return and

that it would be incumbent upon the international community to conduct shuttle diplomacy between the GoS and JEM leadership in the field to bridge the gap. FieldOff reminded him of JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim's public promise to consider joining the peace process once GEN Bashir and other detained JEM members were released, and urged him to engage constructively with UNAMID in this regard, especially since UNAMID had a hand in securing his own release from detention. GEN Bashir agreed to relay the message. FieldOff reiterated this message on January 22 to another JEM rep, who criticized the GoS for the expulsion of non-signatory movements from El Fasher. He also expressed growing disillusionment with UNAMID for failing to engage with JEM. The JEM rep complained that UNAMID seems to be ignoring rebel groups - a dangerous move, he said, since these groups can assure the security of UNAMID in the field.

15. (SBU) Meanwhile, UNAMID reported on January 21 that the security situation in West Darfur remained unpredictable. The GOS had reinforced its positions in El Geneina and Kutum, while the JEM appeared to be positioning itself to keep the GoS out of its West Darfur strongholds, including El Geneina. UNAMID warned that "all factions are preparing for war," and that they must be urged to exercise restraint. GEN Bashir informed FieldOff in the late afternoon of the same day that the GoS had begun an aerial bombardment of Jebel Mun but that no casualties resulted. Bashir proudly reported that in retaliation JEM had shot down a GoS MiG-28 in the mountains near Kabkabiya and had forced another GoS MiG to make an emergency landing in Nyala. (Note: These claims have not been confirmed by independent sources though UNAMID is investigating. End note.) The shooting of the MiG in North Darfur, he crowed, "is very good for us." GEN Bashir also claimed that the GOS has sent three convoys to Jebel Mun (where JEM is located) with armaments to attack JEM forces. FieldOff discussed these reports with the Deputy FC, who had received similar information but could not confirm them.

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#### OTHER NON-SIGNATORIES FORCED TO FOLLOW JEM'S LEAD

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16. (SBU) JEM is not the only non-signatory movement to depart El Fasher in recent days. On January 21 Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) factions and JEM/Collective Leadership received word through UNAMID that the GoS had given them 24 hours to leave El Fasher and to return to their areas of control elsewhere in Darfur. On January 23, a National Intelligence and Security Services representative in El Fasher confirmed to FieldOff that Military Intelligence submitted this instruction via UNAMID to pass to the non-signatories, and that it had been a military decision. One SLA rep told FieldOff that this expulsion policy would make it difficult for them to return to the peace process. Even signatory groups fear for their safety in El Fasher; three SLA/Minni Minawi and SLA/Free Will reps told FieldOff on January 22 that they feared the GoS would eventually find an excuse to crack down on their members in the same way.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Most observers in El Fasher agree that the GoS expulsion of non-signatory movements does not bode well for the security situation in Darfur. This may complicate both UNAMID's role in attempting to mediate between rebel forces and the government and the efforts of the international community to secure a minimum ceasefire as a basic confidence-building measure for peace talks.

18. (SBU) Tripoli minimize considered.

FERNANDEZ